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ABSTRACT

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The concept of a "motive to avoid success" in women (Horner, 1968, 1970, 1972) has proved to be quite popular with researchers (e.g., Tangri, 1969; Schwenn, 1970; Feather & Simon, 1973; Feather & Raphelson, 1974); however, as Tresemer (1973) has pointed out, it is yet to be verified. Problems with research on the motive to avoid success have been: the failure of Horner to cross sex-of-subject with sex-of-the-person in the cue; confusion concerning the meaning of "success," the lack of adequate demonstration that fear of success (FOS) is a motive within the tradition of motivation that Horner extends, the scoring of the projective tests used to assess FOS responses and the ambiguity of subsequent research findings relating FOS to performance.

The present study attempted to resolve some of these problems as well as to illuminate what other personality and behavioral attributes are associated with FOS. First, FOS was reconceptualized as a social perception of what is (and what is not) culturally appropriate sex-role behavior. It was postulated that those women who perceive themselves as overstepping appropriate standards of femininity (e.g., high achievers, Honors students) would be the

most likely to exhibit FOS responses. This conceptualization can account for a variety of results from past research, without drawing upon the concept of a "motive" (e.g., Lipinski, 1965; Horner, 1968; Schwenn, 1970; Makosky, 1973; Monahan, Kuhn, & Shaver, 1974). Related to this, it was additionally postulated that the "success" that females are fearful of is better defined as "inappropriate sex-role behavior." Second, the present experiment attempted to resolve past inconsistencies in relating FOS to performance by varying two important competitor variables: sex and physical attractiveness. It was felt that in short-term competitive interactions such as Horner and others have investigated, the sex of the competitor and his or her physical attractiveness may be the two most salient clues as to what the competitor is like. Finally, in view of the problems and limitations in the previously employed method of assessing and scoring FOS (Horner, 1968), a new measurement was devised for the present experiment.

The experiment was divided into two parts; the purpose of Part I was to investigate the relationship of FOS to a variety of personality and behavioral attributes. In addition, scores obtained from Part I on the FOS measure (Major, 1975) and peer-ratings of attractiveness were used to select subjects for participation in Part II. The purpose of the second part of the experiment was to investigate the relationships between a subject's level of FOS, her level of physical attractiveness, and her performance against four different competitors relative to no-competitor. It was hypothesized that interactions would

exist between attractiveness of the female, her level of FOS and the performance situation.

Method

Subjects. Seventy-three female undergraduates participated in Part I. Of these, 40 were selected for participation in Part II so that there were ten in each of four groups--low attractive-low FOS (LOW ATT-LOW FOS), low attractive-high FOS (LOW ATT-HIGH FOS), high attractive-low FOS (HIGH ATT-LOW FOS), and high attractive-high FOS (HIGH ATT-HIGH FOS).

Procedure. In order to pre-select the subjects for Part II, subjects participated in taking the new scale of FOS (Major, 1975) and other personality and behavioral measures. Additionally, two male and two female confederates independently rated each subject present in Part I in terms of their physical attractiveness on a 1 to 9 point scale where 1 indicated extremely unattractive and 9 indicated extremely attractive.

In Part II, four independent variables were manipulated in a 2^4 repeated measures factorial design: attractiveness of the subject (high or low), level of FOS of the subject (high or low), attractiveness of the competitor (high or low) and sex of the competitor. All subjects competed on anagram tests against videotaped performances of all four competitors (previously rated for attractiveness) and also participated in the no-competitor control condition. The number of words completed in response to each anagram task constituted the dependent variable. The sequence of the five performance situations: no-competitor, high attractive male, high attractive female, low attractive male, and

low attractive female, was counterbalanced for sequence, groups, and subjects, so that within a group no competitive situation appeared more than twice with a particular anagram word or more than twice in a particular position. Subsequent to taking all anagrams in all conditions, subjects were given a post-experimental questionnaire and debriefed (except for the attractiveness manipulation).

Results

To test the hypothesis that interactions would exist between the attractiveness of the subject, her level of FOS and the performance situation, a four-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures was performed on the final two-minute performance data (transformed to z scores). A significant three-way interaction between subject attractiveness (ATT), FOS, and sex of the competitor was obtained ($F = 5.55$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .05$), as illustrated by Figure 1. Although the no-competitor data were not included in this analysis they are shown in Figure 1 for purpose of comparison. No main effects or any other interactions were significant.

A 2 X 2 (ATT X FOS) ANOVA on the no-competitor scores indicated that the main effect for ATT was significant ($p < .05$). Low attractive women performed significantly better in the non-competitive condition than did high attractive women. In order to further investigate these relationships, a 2 X 2 X 3 (ATT X FOS X Situation) ANOVA with repeated measures was performed on the male (high and low attractive combined), female (high and low attractive combined) and no-competitor data. The main effect for

ATT was again found to be significant ($p < .05$). Low attractives performed better than did high attractives.

Analysis of Concomitant Variables

Correlational data obtained from Part I indicated that high FOS was significantly correlated with lower self-perceived attractiveness ($r = -.24$, $p < .05$) and lower self-ratings of frequency of dating ($r = -.40$, $p < .001$). In order to further clarify the above results, the four groups of subjects tested in Part II were examined for differences in scores on the concomitant variables investigated in Part I.

A 2 X 2 (ATT X FOS) ANOVA on self-perceived attractiveness ratings indicated that the main effect for FOS was significant ($p < .005$). High FOS women perceived themselves as significantly less attractive than did low FOS women. The main effect for ATT approached significance ($p < .06$). A 2 X 2 ANOVA on dating frequency again indicated a main effect for FOS ($p < .001$). High FOS subjects rated themselves as dating less frequently than did low FOS subjects. A 2 X 2 ANOVA on subjects' ratings of how attractive they thought males perceived them indicated that the main effect for ATT was significant ($p < .01$). Peer-rated high attractives saw themselves as significantly more attractive to males than did peer-rated low attractives. The main effect for FOS was not significant. A 2 X 2 ANOVA on grade point average (GPA) revealed that the ATT X FOS interaction approached significance ($p < .06$). LOW ATT-LOW FOS subjects had the highest GPA and HIGH ATT-LOW FOS subjects had the lowest GPA, but this difference was not significant.

Discussion

Although the attractiveness of the competitor had little effect on performance within or across subject groups, the attractiveness of the subject, her level of FOS and the sex of the competitor were potent variables affecting competitive behavior in women. The behavior of the high FOS subjects and the HIGH ATT-LOW FOS subjects approximated Horner's (1968) results. She found that low FOS women and the majority of males performed better in competitive than noncompetitive situations, but high FOS women did not. The data from the present study further indicated that complex interactions were occurring between rated attractiveness, self-perceived attractiveness, FOS, and sex of competitor. The trends of the data illustrated in Figure 1 are provocative: low FOS women, depending upon their level of attractiveness, performed in almost opposite fashions; this same pattern was also true for high FOS women. A closer look led to the speculation that <u>females</u> were the salient competitors for the arousal of FOS in LOW ATT-HIGH FOS women, whereas <u>males</u> were the salient competitors for the arousal of FOS in HIGH ATT-HIGH FOS women.

A further analysis of the Part I and Part II results combined, indicated that women who perceived themselves as unattractive, regardless of their peer-rated attractiveness, scored high in FOS and women who perceived that they did not date frequently scored high in FOS. But it was the two groups of women whose self-reports indicated inconsistencies between their self-perceived attractiveness and their perceived attractiveness to males who <u>performed</u> in the predicted high FOS fashion (the LOW ATT-LOW FOS and HIGH ATT-

HIGH FOS subjects); they performed worst against males. The women who appeared certain of their unattractiveness and undesirability to males (the LOW ATT-HIGH FOS subjects) performed their worst against females. Only those women whose self-reports indicated that they were confident of their attractiveness and desirability to males (the HIGH ATT-LOW FOS subjects) appeared ready to face the possible negative consequences that might ensue from successful competition. Inconsistencies in past research attempting to relate FOS to performance may be due to the failure to take into account the sex of the competitor and the attractiveness of the subject.

An additional and unexpected finding was that low attractive women performed significantly better than did the high attractive women in both the competitive and noncompetitive situations. A corollary of this finding was the near significant interaction between FOS and ATT for grade-point average. One explanation postulated for this finding is that the subjects were fulfilling a stereotype the author has often noted: successful women are often assumed, especially by males, to be unattractive, whereas conversely, pretty women are assumed to be dumb. This stereotype appears to be based on the notion that "if a woman is so ugly that she can't get a man, then she settles for a career." The subjects in the present experiment, depending upon their attractiveness, may have been enacting a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact that their grade-point averages differed as well may indicate that the stereotype has a pervasive influence on behavior.

In short, results from the present study indicated that the entire theoretical structure behind the concept of "fear of success"

needs to be re-examined. FOS appears to be related less to need for achievement, honors standing, and grade-point average than it is to such self-concept variables as self-perceived attractiveness, perceived frequency of dating, and perceived attractiveness to males.

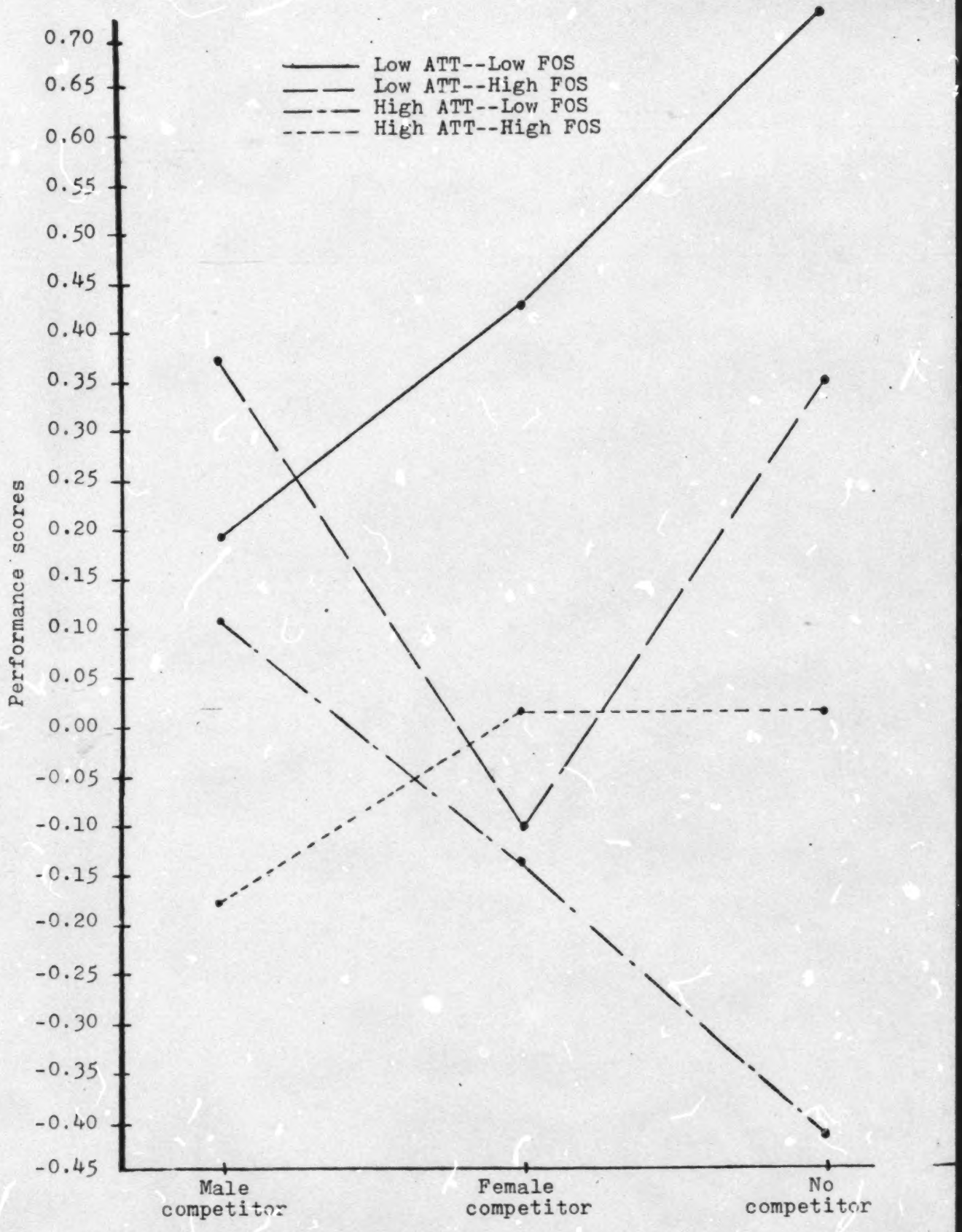

Figure 1. Mean F2M performance scores within the subject attractiveness, fear of success, and type of competitor conditions.

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